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ROMAN RELIGION AS SEEN IN
PLINY'S NATURAL HISTORY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF LATIN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1932

By

JACOB WILLIAM CASPAR

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INTRODUCTION

The Natural History of Pliny the Elder is an inexhaustible treasure house of information on the most varied subjects, a veritable ancient encyclopedia. It contains much of the knowledge of antiquity on Geography, Astronomy, Anthropology, Zoology, Botany, Medicine, Mineralogy and History of Art. But of Religion Pliny does not treat specifically. Most of his references to the subject are incidental, taken frequently from other sources and not necessarily reflecting his own opinions.

The purpose of this dissertation has been to classify and study all the passages bearing on the religious life and experience of Pliny's contemporaries and ancestors with the object of discovering what light they throw on the religious conditions of his own day. A special effort has been made to get a clear perception of his own beliefs and views as revealed in his work. And since Pliny would tend to share the opinions of the cultured class of society to which he belonged it can hardly be denied that with the expression of his own views he gave voice to those of many contemporaries and thus a fair impression may be gained of the trend in religious matters at Rome among the intellectuals in the second half of the first century A.D.

Pliny lived during a significant period in the history of Roman religion. Ancient Roman worship, rites and beliefs were disintegrating rapidly; the ultimate failure of the religious reforms of Augustus was becoming more and more apparent; the cult of Isis was officially recognized by the state; Caesar worship was becoming entrenched; Stoicism was making a strong appeal to the intellectual circles; and, finally, Christianity was silently making its way and accepted the first challenge of paganism under Nero. Although Pliny did not take cognizance of all of these developments some of their effects will be found mirrored in his pages.

In the complete dissertation Pliny's contributions to our knowledge of Roman religion have been treated under five main heads. The Cults have been discussed under the headings: i. Di Indigetes; ii. Di Novensides of Italic Origin; iii. Di Novensides of Greek Origin; iv. Deification of Abstract Ideas; v. Divi Imperatores; vi. Sacra Peregrina. The Religious Observances and Ritual have been treated under: i. Festivals; ii. Prayer; iii. Sacrifice; iv. Means of Purification; v. Ritual Instruments; vi. Lectisternia; vii. Monetary Donations; viii. A Burial Custom;

ix. Inaugural Banquet; x. Divination. The third chief division deals with the Priesthoods: i. Luperci; ii. Fratres Arvales. Omens, Portents, Prodigies are presented in the fourth under: i. Sky and Earth Portents; ii. Animal Prodigies; iii. Prodigies in Trees; iv. Prodigies Presented by Human Beings; v. Visions and Apparitions; vi. Varia. The fifth main section Pliny's Beliefs is here given in full but from the others only some of the more significant parts have been selected.

CHAPTER I

SOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE OF ROMAN RELIGION

1. Iuppiter Indiges

In N.H. 3. 56 Pliny says: "in principio est Ostia colonia a Romano rege deducta, oppidum Laurentum, lucus Iovis Indigetis, amnis Numicius, Ardea a Danae Persei matre condita." All that can be concluded from this matter-of-fact enumeration seems to be that in Pliny's day there was a grove near Laurentum or Lauro-Lavinium¹ known as the grove of Iuppiter Indiges. The only other references to Iuppiter Indiges are Livy 1. 2. 6: "secundum inde proelium Latinis, Aeneae etiam ultimum mortalium operum fuit. situs est, quemcumque eum dici ius fasque est, super Numicium fluvium; Iovem Indigetem appellant." and Servius on Aen. 1. 259:

"Aeneas secundum quosdam in Numicium (al. Numicum) cecidit fluvium; secundum Ovidium (Met. 14) in coelum raptus est, appellatus tamen est Iuppiter Indiges... Itaque ei templum condidit (sc. Ascanius), et Iovem indigetem appellavit."

As may be noticed both Livy and Servius say that the name Iuppiter Indiges was given to Aeneas. In fact, Pliny alone does not definitely connect the name with Aeneas. In various other authors² Aeneas is called: Pater Indiges, Indiges, Aeneas Indiges, and Deus Indiges. That originally there must have been a cult of Iuppiter Indiges at or near Lauro-Lavinium, probably with a sanctuary in the grove mentioned by Pliny, seems pretty certain; but no information about the cult beyond the mere name has come down to us. What little evidence there is seems to point to an early identification of Iuppiter Indiges³ with Aeneas, which would indicate a belief that the Iuppiter Indiges cult was of great antiquity, antedating the founding of Rome. In the course of time, as the result of the identification, Aeneas' name displaced that

¹Cf. Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, s.v. LAVINIUM, pp. 1007 ff.

²See A. Schwegler, Römische Geschichte, p. 287 n. 21 for the complete list.

³G. Wissowa, De Dis Romanorum Indigetibus et Novensidibus Disputatio, p. vi says that Indiges is equivalent to indigenous; see W. Warde Fowler, The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic, pp. 192 f. for a discussion of this and another interpretation of the term.

of Jupiter, though the cult title was retained. What vogue the Aeneas Indiges cult enjoyed is impossible to determine because of lack of evidence.¹ There is, however, one important statement concerning the cult in Schol. Veron. ad Aen. l. 260 where we read of annual sacrifices being performed by the Roman pontiffs at the shrine of Aeneas Indiges: "Ascanius hostibus devictis in loco quo (pater) apparuerat, Aeneae indigeti templum dicavit, ad quod pontifices quotannis cum consulibus veniunt sacrificaturi." If this is correct the cult must have been taken over by the state. In the absence of corroborating evidence, however, this point must remain doubtful.

2. Iuppiter Elicius

Several other cult titles of Jupiter are mentioned by Pliny in N.H. 2. 140:

"Exstat annalium memoria sacris quibusdam et precautionibus vel cogi fulmina vel inpetrari. Vetus fama Etruriae est inpetratum, Volsinios urbem depopulatis agris subeunte monstro quod vocavere Voltam, evocatum a Porsina suo rege. Et ante eum a Numa saepius hoc facilitatum in primo annalium suorum tradit L. Piso, gravis auctor, quod imitatum parum rite Tullium Hostilium ictum fulmine. Lucosque et aras et sacra habemus, interque Statores ac Tonantes et Feretrios Elicium quoque accepimus Iovem."

It is fairly obvious from this passage that Pliny, in accord with other ancient authors,² thought of Iuppiter Elicius as a god who was connected with rites designed to call down lightning from the sky. Numa was said to have instituted the proper ritual and to have dedicated an altar on the Aventine to Iuppiter Elicius for the purpose of obtaining signs by lightning of the divine will. Lightning was always regarded as one of the surest manifestations of celestial approval or disapproval. Cf. Livy l. 20. 7:

"Numa... quae prodigia fulminibus aliove quo visu missa susciperentur atque curarentur, ad ea elicienda ex mentibus divinis Iovi Elicio aram in Aventino dedicavit deumque consuluit auguriis quae suscipienda essent."

This view, universally held in antiquity, has been attacked by Aust³ after the suggestion had been made by Gilbert⁴ that the

¹Dion. Hal. l. 64 speaks of a mound of earth, encircled with fine trees, on the bank of the little river Numicius which was pointed out as Aeneas' grave.

²Livy. l. 20. 7; 31. 8; Varro, L.L. 6. 94; Plut. Numa 15; Arnob. 5.1; Ovid. Fast. 3.327-30; 285ff.; Manil. l. 104; Sen. O.N. 2.42.

³W.H. Roscher, Mythologisches Lexicon, ii. pp. 656 ff.

⁴Topogr. 2. 154.

manalis lapis belonged to the cult of Iuppiter Elicius. Aust tries to show that Jupiter with the cult title Elicius was nothing but a rain-god and that the rite of aquaelicism¹ constituted the entire cult of this god. Aust is followed by Wissowa,² but Fowler³ views the theory with suspicion and Morgan⁴ says that he sees no real evidence whatever in favor of it. The objections against Aust's view are briefly these: (1) the temple of Mars near which the lapis manalis was kept⁵ was almost a mile and a half from the porta Capena⁶ and therefore nearly two from the altar to Iuppiter Elicius on the Aventine, which would have been the logical place for it if connected with that cult; (2) aquaelicism is a general term and means any rite by which rain is sought; (3) the nudipedalia, which Aust connects with the manalis lapis, have nothing to do with it: the former was an act of worship, the use of the latter a magic rite;⁷ (4) it would be necessary to assume that all the ancient accounts of the functions of the god are wrong.⁸ Even supposing that they all go back to Valerius Antias, as Aust would have us believe, we have no right to conclude that this much-maligned historian did not tell the truth about the kind of god Iuppiter Elicius was or that he was ignorant about the general meaning of ceremonies going on in his own city.⁹ It follows then that the epithet Elicius¹⁰ was rightly derived by the ancients ab eliciendis fulminibus and Iuppiter Elicius was the god to whom the sacrifices and prayers were addressed for the purpose of drawing down lightning.¹¹ So far as this cult is concerned

¹Paul. (ed. Lindsay) p. 2: Aquaelicism dicitur, cum aqua pluvialis remediis quibusdam elicitur, ut quondam, si creditur, manali lapide in urbem ducto.

²Religion und Kultus der Römer,² p. 121.

³Op. cit. p. 233.

⁴"Rain-Gods and Rain-Charms," TAPA 32(1901), pp. 105f.

⁵Cf. Paul. p. 115.

⁶S.B. Platner and T. Ashby, A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome, p. 327.

⁷Cf. Morgan, op. cit. p. 102 and Fowler, op. cit. p. 233.

⁸See Morgan, op. cit. p. 106.

⁹Ibid. note 2.

¹⁰A.B. Cook, "Zeus, Jupiter and the Oak," CR 17(1903), p. 270 says: "Plutarch's version suggests rather that there was a Iuppiter Illicius, Jupiter of the oak (ilex, iliceus, iligneus, ilignus)."

¹¹E.S. McCartney, "Classical Weather Lore of Thunder and Lightning," CW xiv(No. 25), p. 212 says: "Though he (i.e. Iuppiter Elicius) may have had to do with rain originally, he was more

Pliny has preserved the correct tradition.

3. Iuppiter Feretrius

The mention of Iuppiter Feretrius N.H. 2. 140¹ seems to imply that Pliny regarded Iuppiter Feretrius as a lightning god, and here again his interpretation is apparently sound. The same view is found in a passage in Plutarch² to the effect that in the opinion of some of the ancients Feretrius was an epithet of Jupiter who hurls the lightning and was derived from ferire; in other words, Iuppiter Feretrius is the god who strikes with lightning. There is no adequate support for the other explanations of the cult-title feretrius offered by ancient writers who derived it from fero, feretrum, the litter on which the spoils were carried,³ or from ferre pacem,⁴ or from ferire, in the sense of striking a victim in making a treaty—foedus ferire.⁵

The shrine of Iuppiter Feretrius is said to have been the first in Rome.⁶ It was on the north elevation of the Capitoline hill. Its great age is attested by the fact that the cult was aniconic and in place of the god's statue a sacred flint and a scepter were kept in the sanctuary.⁷ The flint is supposed to have been a representation of a thunder-bolt, pointing to the activity of the god in the thunderstorm.⁸

But Iuppiter Feretrius was also a war-god, as is indicated by the fact that spolia opima were dedicated to him. That the god of lightning should come to be thought of as one who could also strike in battle was an easy transfer. It is one that was

generally thought of as the god from whom the bolt was drawn." As pointed out there is not a shred of ancient evidence to show that Iuppiter Elicius had ever to do with rain, either originally or later.

¹Quoted on p. 2.

²Maro. 8. 7: καλεῖται δὲ ὁ μὲν θεὸς... Φερέτριος Ζεὺς, .. ὡς δὲ ἑτέροι (sc. φασί), Διὸς ἐστὶν ἡ προσωνομεία κεραυνοβολοῦντος τὸ γὰρ τύπτειν φερίρε οἱ ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν.

³Cf. Livy 1. 10. 5.

⁴Paul. p. 81: Feretrius Iuppiter dictus a ferendo, quod pacem ferre putaretur; ex cuius templo sumebant sceptrum, per quod iurarent, et lapidem silicem, quo foedus ferirent.

⁵Platner-Ashby, op. cit. p. 294.

⁶Ibid. p. 293.

⁷See note 4 above.

⁸Cf. Wissowa, op. cit. p. 117; Fowler, op. cit. p. 231 says: "I am rather inclined to agree with the suggestion of Dr. Tylor, that it was a stone celt believed to have been a thunder-bolt."

recognized in ancient times.¹ And it was as a war-god that he became associated with all those ceremonies pertaining to the declaration of war² and the making of treaties³ with which the Fetiales, the first representatives of international law, were concerned.⁴ They used in their ceremonial certain sacred herbs called sagmina or verbenae,⁵ to which Pliny refers in N.H. 22. 5:

"...sagmina in remediis publicis fuere et in sacris legationibusque verbenae. certe utroque nomine idem significatur, hoc est gramen ex arce cum sua terra evolsum, ac semper e legatis cum ad hostes clarigatumque mitterentur, id est res raptas clare repetitum, unus utique verbenarius vocabatur."

Pliny is correct in saying that the herbs were gathered on the arx or north hill of the Mons Capitolinus. Livy⁶ also mentions the arx as the place. It was here that the shrine of Iuppiter Feretrius was. Servius⁷ statement that they were gathered de loco sacro Capitolii, that is from the south hill, is wrong. The version of Livy and Pliny is supported by that of Festus, p. 424:

"Sagmina vocantur verbenae, id est herbae purae, quia ex loco sancto arcis carpebantur (MSS sancto arcebantur)⁸ a consule praetoreve, legatis proficiscentibus ad foedus faciendum bellumque indicendum; vel a sanciendo, id est confirmando."

One of the fetials carried the verbenae and was called verbenarius,⁹ while the other, called pater patratus, had the silex and sceptrum in his care.¹⁰ The same herbs were used also to sweep the altar of Jupiter and for the purification of houses, as we find it stated in N.H. 25. 105:

"Nulla tamen Romanae nobilitatis plus habet quam hierobotane. aliqui peristereon, nostri verbenacam vocant. haec est quam legatos ferre ad hostis indicavimus. hac Iovis mensa verritur, domus purgantur lustranturque."¹¹

¹Cf. Plut. Rom. 16; Marg. 8.

²Cf. Livy 1. 32. 5-14.

³Ibid. 1. 24. 4-9; 30. 43. 9.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Loc. cit.; Marian. Digest. 1. 8. 8. 1; Serv. Aen. 12. 120.

⁶1. 24. 5.

⁷Aen. 12. 120.

⁸Cf. Wissowa, op. cit. p. 557, n. 7.

⁹Cf. Varro ap. Non. p. 848, 17(L). Cf. J.S. Reid, "Human Sacrifice at Rome etc." JRS 2(1912), pp. 47-49.

¹⁰Wissowa, op. cit. pp. 551f. Cf. Reid, op. cit. pp. 49-51.

¹¹Cf. Serv. Aen. 12. 120: Abusive tamen verbenas iam vocamus

4. Iuppiter and Summanus

In Pliny N.H. 2. 138 we read:

"Tuscorum litterae novem deos emittere fulmina existimant, eaque esse undecim generum, Iovem enim trina iaculari. Romani duo tantum ex eis servavere, diurna attribuentes Iovi, nocturna Summano, rariora sane eadem de causa frigidioris caeli."

The Romans did not adopt this detailed classification of lightning elaborated by the Etruscans but recognized only two kinds: viz. lightning by day and lightning by night. Of the former they believed Jupiter to be the author and of the latter Summanus. Other evidence to show that Summanus was a lightning god is found in Paul. p. 66: "Dium fulgur appellabant diurnum, quod putabant Iovis, ut nocturnum Summani." and in Festus p. 254: "Itaque Iovi Fulguri et Summano fit, quod diurna Iovis, nocturna Summani fulgura habentur." S. Augustine, too, well acquainted with the works of the Roman antiquarians, has something to say about Summanus in De civ. dei 4. 23:

"Sicut enim apud ipsos legitur, Romani veteres nescio quem Summanum, cui nocturna fulmina tribuebant, coluerunt magis quam Iovem—sed postquam Iovi templum insigne ac sublime constructum est, propter aedis dignitatem sic ad eum multitudo confluit, ut vix inveniatur, qui Summani nomen, quod audire iam non potest, se saltem legisse meminerit."

In addition there are inscriptions which show that a distinction was made between bolts which fell during the night and such as struck in daytime.¹ The obvious conclusion to draw seems to be that Summanus was a lightning god and that he was of Etruscan origin. This, however, is not the accepted view, but rather has it been maintained² that the Summanus cult was a splitoff from the Jupiter cult and that the name was originally an epithet of Jupiter. The ancient view that Summanus was from the first an independent Etruscan lightning god has lately found a champion in St. Weinstock³ who discusses the question thoroughly and convincingly.

Two explanations of the name Summanus have come down from antiquity: both deriving it from Latin. One, by Martianus Capella

omnes frondes sacratas, ut est laurus, oliva vel myrtus.

¹CIL vi. 206: FULGUR / SUMMAN(IUM) CONDIT(UM):30879;30880.

²Wissowa, op. cit. p. 135; Thulin, Die etruskische Disziplin, I. p. 23; Peter, Lex. iv. p. 1600.

³Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Enc. 2te Reihe, 7.Halbbd. p. 897 s.v. SUMMANUS.

2. 161, equates it with summus Manium and has been justly rejected; the other, from Corp. Gloss. lat. 2. 348, derives it from sub and mane and has been generally accepted. But it too is impossible; for sub and mane could mean either 'in the morning' or 'about morning, shortly before morning' but never 'of the night.' It being thus impossible to derive and interpret the name from Latin it seems reasonable to think that Pliny or his source is probably right in implying the Etruscan origin of the god.

The fact that the statue of Summanus was located in 275 B.C. on the temple of Iuppiter O.M.¹ is no definite proof that Summanus was a Roman god; it is only natural that a foreign lightning god should at first after his introduction be placed in the temple of his Roman counterpart.

A positive argument against Summanus' connection with Jupiter is found in the ritual; the Arval brothers sacrificed Summano patri verbeses atros II.² Black victims were never offered to Jupiter but regularly to the gods of the lower world. With the means at our disposal it cannot be proved, however, that Summanus was definitely one of them;³ ancient evidence knows him only as a god of lightning. Platner-Ashby⁴ conjecture that the temple of Dis pater mentioned only in Not. (Reg. XI; om Cur.), is perhaps to be identified with the temple of Summanus which stood on the west side of the Circus towards the Aventine.

Two inscriptions to Iuppiter Summanus, belonging to the imperial period and discovered in Northern Italy,⁵ have been taken to mean that Summanus was originally an epithet of Jupiter,⁶ but in my opinion the trend of the evidence adduced points to the exact reverse as the more probable process. Summanus began as an independent deity; but, owing to the circumscribed sphere of his influence and activity, he was overshadowed by his more powerful rival and his cult fell gradually into neglect. His functions were taken over by Jupiter and his name became an epithet of the wielder of the lightning of the day.

In 29. 57 Pliny mentions a Summanus temple at Rome: inter aedem Iuventatis et Summani; it was built near the Circus Maximus⁷ during the war with Pyrrhus because the terra-cotta figure of Summanus in the pediment of the temple of Iuppiter Capitolinus

¹Cic. De div. 1.16; Livy per. 14; cf. Wissowa, op.cit. p.135.

²Henzen, Act. frat. Arv. p. 146.

³Cf. Wissowa, op. cit. p. 135 n. 7.

⁴P. 502.

⁵CIL v. 3256; 5660.

⁶Weinstock, loc.cit. calls them "eine rein örtliche Erscheinung."
⁷Varro, L.L. 5.74; Livy 32.29.1; Ovid. Fast. 6.731; Arnob. 6.3.

is said to have been struck by lightning and its head hurled into the Tiber in 278 B.C.¹

5. Aesculapius

The official introduction of the cult of Aesculapius was occasioned by a plague and the subsequent consultation of the Sibylline books in 293 B.C.² A commission was sent to Epidaurus, the most famous center of the cult at the time, and it brought back one of the sacred snakes; Pliny has a reference to the event in 29. 72: "Anguis Aesculapius Epidauro Romam advectus est volgoque pascitur et in domibus,..." According to the story the snake left the ship as it was coming up the Tiber and swam to the island where as a consequence the temple was built soon after and dedicated in 291 B.C. Pliny, however, in 29. 16 follows another tradition: "ideo templum Aesculapi, etiam cum reciperetur is deus, extra urbem fecisse iterumque in insula traduntur,..." The obvious conclusion to draw from this statement is that there existed in Rome a temple of Aesculapius before the temple in insula was constructed. The passage runs so effectively counter to the common tradition that it has been suspected and Sillig emends iterumque to Tiberinaque. Wissowa³ admits that if the Pliny text is sound an earlier sanctuary of the god must have existed. E. Schmidt⁴ has established a strong probability that Aesculapius was known and worshipped in Rome prior to 293 B.C. and lately Bartoli⁵ has reached the conclusion that Pliny was right in stating that there were two Aesculapius temples. Varro's⁶ reference to paintings seen by him in Aesculapi aede vetere may be taken to give support to Pliny's contention. Platner-Ashby⁷ say that from this reference and some inscriptions⁸ it appears certain that the temple 'on the island' was rebuilt or restored towards the end of the republic. There is, however, nothing in the inscriptions cited to warrant such a conclusion. The phrase 'etiam cum reciperetur is deus' indicates that the god had been worshipped in Rome before he was officially recognized. It is indeed highly probable that he originally came to Rome from some Greek colony in Southern Italy

¹Cic. De div. 1. 16; Livy per. 14.

²Livy 10. 47. 7.

³Op. cit. p. 307 n. 7.

⁴"Kultübertragungen," Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, 1909, pp. 31-46.

⁵Rend. Acc. Lincei, 26. (1917), pp. 573-80.

⁶L.L. 7. 57.

⁷Op. cit. p. 2.

⁸CIL vi. 6. 7. 12.

and that he was received among the Roman state gods on the occasion of a severe plague and was given the temple on the island.¹ Pliny thus seems to have preserved the right tradition.

Of statues of the god, of which there must have been many, Pliny mentions only one, which was certainly at Rome; it was by the artist Niceratus and was placed in the temple of Concordia.²

6. Isis

Isis enjoyed great vogue in Egypt from time immemorial, but the Isis cult taken over by Rome was not the old Egyptian cult with its principal figures: Isis, Osiris and Horus but the re-organized Ptolemaic version of the cult in which Isis, Serapis and Harpocrates played the leading rôles. Pliny has a reference to the cult in 27. 53: "huius (i.e. absinthii marini) ramum Isiaci praeferre sollemne habent." A branch of wormwood was carried in the processions for which the cult was famous.³ The practice of wearing representations of Harpocrates and other Egyptian divinities set in rings⁴ on one's fingers as talismans which began to be indulged in even by men in Pliny's day is mentioned with disapproval by our author in 33. 41: "iam vero et Harpocraten statuasque Aegyptiorum numinum in digitis viri quoque portare incipiunt."⁵ In view of the fact that the cult was officially recognized in Pliny's lifetime⁶ it seems odd that his references to it are so few and insignificant. The explanation is perhaps found in 2. 21 where he says: "Externis famulantur sacris, ac digitis deos gestant, monstra quoque colunt, damnant et excoGITANT cibos, imperia dira in ipsos ne somno quidem quieto inrogant." This passage is an attack on Oriental cults, especially that of Isis. Digitis deos gestant refers to the latter indubitably; monstra quoque colunt was obviously inspired by representations of the jackal-headed Anubis and the sacred cow of Isis which Pliny must have seen parading the streets in the processions of the votaries of Isis; and the imperia dira are probably the precepts of fasting and abstinence which were imposed on the faithful in the same cult. The words damnant et excoGITANT cibos apply perhaps more justly to Judaism with its prohibition of pork and insistence on unleavened bread. At any rate, it seems clear that Pliny was op-

¹Cf. Schmidt, op. cit. pp. 45f.

²N.H. 34. 80.

³Cf. Ovid. Met. 1. 747; Juvenal 6. 533; Apul. Met. 11.8-11.

⁴Cf. N.H. 33. 131: Tinguunt Aegyptus argentum, ut in vasis Anubim spectet,...

⁵Cf. Ibid. 2. 21: ...ac digitis deos gestant,...

⁶Probably in Caligula's reign.

posed to and disliked all foreign cults in general and that of Isis perhaps in particular.

7. Prayer

The ritual of prayer and sacrifice was a salient feature of the religious life of the Roman people. Performed on the proper occasions and in the right places by duly authorized persons it served as one of the means taken by the citizens of the Roman community to maintain the right relations between themselves and their gods. It has been asserted that prayer developed from spells and incantations¹ and that with the Romans it never got beyond the stage of the "magic formula, producing its effect by its own inherent quality."² Fowler³ has investigated this question with a view of discovering whether the prayers of Roman worship as we know them were really spells and he finds that with the exception perhaps of the Carmen Arvale Roman prayers, even when the outward form resembles spells with their repetitions and precise wording, the language and spirit of the prayers is that of petition betraying in no wise the idea of binding and forcing the deity and are therefore true prayers. He expressly excludes vota in which there is a sort of contract or covenant between the man and the god and it is these vota which were largely responsible for the notion that Roman prayer is simply a binding formula. Fowler's view is in all probability much closer to the truth of the matter than that of Wissowa⁴ who believes that according to the Roman point of view prayer was not so much an act of devotion in itself as an oral declaration making the contract with the deity binding for the devotee and, if properly delivered, forcing the deity to enter it as the party of the second part. Even the vota, in which of course there was something in the nature of a bargain or a covenant, can scarcely have been thought of as being capable of forcing the deity to do the worshiper's bidding. There never was evident in any votum an attitude of contempt towards or of equality with the deity concerned; this is clearly brought out by the evocatio which is a votum addressed to the gods of a hostile city, who could not possibly be thought of as being under any obligation whatever to accede to the request made of them. In dealing with their own gods the attitude of the Romans was much

¹G. Appel, "De Romanorum Precationibus," Religionsgeschichte, bd. 7, hft. 2, p. 75.

²Dr. Westermarck quoted by Fowler, Religious Experience of the Roman People, p. 185.

³Rel. Exp. pp. 185 ff.

⁴Op. cit. pp. 398 ff.

the same in Fowler's¹ opinion except that their faith was greater.

But let us examine Pliny's statements on the topic. Nearly all his references to prayer are found in 28. 10-21 and he begins by saying that great uncertainty attaches to the question whether or not certain words and incantations have that magic power attributed to them by the common people but denied them by the more cultured: 28. 10:

"Ex homine remediorum primum maximae quaestionis et semper incertae est, polleantne aliquid verba et incantamenta carminum. quod si verum est, homini acceptum fieri oportere conveniat, sed viritum sapientissimi cuiusque respuit fides. in universum vero omnibus horis credit vita nec sentit. quippe victimam caedi sine precatione non videtur referre aut deos rite consuli."

The question at once suggests itself: is he thinking of magic formulas or prayers? He does not seem to make any definite and clear-cut distinction between the two, for he uses carmen, incantamentum, precatio, deprecatio indiscriminately. The conclusion is obvious: he includes prayer among magic and incantations, for while he is dealing undoubtedly with magic in these paragraphs he quotes examples which can be and ought to be styled prayers rather than spells. The importance of prayer in the Roman ritual is indicated by Pliny's remark that no victim was sacrificed without a proper prayer being said.

In 28. 11 Pliny classifies prayers as follows: "Praeterea alia sunt verba inpetritis, alia depulsoriis, alia commendatoriis,..." While there can be no doubt that some such difference did exist between the various types of prayers this difference was of secondary significance; it is more important to note that all prayers were of similar construction on the whole.² For our purpose it is more convenient to classify them as votum, devotio, and evocatio.

a) Types of Prayers

(1) Votum

Numerous examples of vota have come down to us; Pliny refers to them in 8. 57:

"simili modo Elpis Samius natione in Africam delatus nave, iuxta litus conspecto leone hiatu minaci, arborem fuga petit Libero patre invocato, quoniam tum praecipuus votorum locus est, cum spei nullus est."

According to this passage a vow is in order when every other hope

¹Rel. Exp. p. 206.

²Appel, op. cit. p. 205.

has vanished and every human means of help has been exhausted. This seems to be Pliny's own view and a very sensible one it is too.

A special kind of vow, made only in times of great national stress, was the ver sacrum. By this rite there was consecrated to the deity all the young of the valuable domestic animals¹ born in one spring.² Originally children were included but on the last and only historical occasion of a ver sacrum in 217 B.C. there is no mention of them in the account.³ The practice was to sacrifice the animals but the children, when grown up, were sent away from their native country to look for and establish new homes elsewhere.⁴ They were believed to be under the special protection of Mars who sent his sacred animals to guide them. In this way some communities accounted for their origin and name; for instance in 3. 110 Pliny says: "orti sunt (sc. Picensi) a Sabinis voto vere sacro." Similarly the Hirpini allegedly received their name from having been led by a wolf⁵ and the Samnites named their city Bovianum after the bull who had guided them.⁶ The practice of vowing a ver sacrum was by no means limited to the Latins, but, as seen by these examples, other Italian stocks were familiar with it too.

(2) Devotio

Closely related to the votum is the devotio by which a magistrate cum imperio in battle promises to the gods of the underworld his own life or that of a Roman soldier chosen by him⁷ in return for the destruction of the enemy forces. In 28. 12 Pliny mentions the fact that the carmen used by Decius Mus at his devotio survived: "durat immenso exemplo Deciorum patris filique quo se devovere carmen..." The text of this carmen has been preserved by Livy in 8. 9. 6ff. and runs thus:

"Iane, Iuppiter, Mars pater, Quirine, Bellona, Lares, Divi Novensiles, Di Indigetes, Divi quorum est potestas nostrorum hostiumque, Diique Manes, vos precor veneror veniam peto feroque, uti populo Romano Quiritibus vim, victoriam prosperetis hostesque populi Romani Quiritium terrore formidine morteque adficiatis. Sicut verbis nuncupavi, ita pro republica Quiritium, exercitu, legionibus,

¹Cf. Livy 22. 10. 3.

²During the period from Mar. 1 to Apr. 30; cf. Livy 34. 44. 3.

³Livy 22. 9. 10 - 10. 6; 33. 44. 1f; 34. 44. 1-3, 6.

⁴Wissowa, op. cit. p. 420.

⁵Paul. 93; Strabo 5. 20.

⁶Wissowa, op. cit. p. 145.

⁷Cf. Livy 8. 10. 11.

auxiliis populi Romani Quiritium, legiones auxiliaque
hostium mecum Deis Manibus Tellurique devoveo."

The original magic formula used with this rite has been given a religious turn by the priests, especially in the first part, which is a prayer combined with a curse upon the enemy. Not only are the Roman gods invoked rather inclusively but the gods of the enemy as well. The last part is clearly a magical spell: by the act of self-sacrifice Decius exercises magical power over the legions of the enemy and devotes them with himself to death.¹

(3) Evocatio

A strange form of the votum was that addressed to the gods of a hostile city under siege to induce them to abandon their present abodes and transfer their protection to the Romans. Pliny speaks of the rite in 28. 18:

"Verrius Flaccus auctores ponit quibus credat in op-
pugnationibus ante omnia solitum a Romanis sacerdotibus
evocari deum cuius in tutela id oppidum esset promittique
illi eundem aut ampliorem apud Romanos cultum."

The rite was successfully employed at the siege of Veii when the dictator M. Furius Camillus addressed the patron goddess of the town thus:² "Te simul, Iuno regina, quae nunc Veios colis, precor, ut nos victores in nostram tuamque mox futuram urbem sequere, ubi te dignum amplitudine tua templum accipiat." The Roman state felt it as its duty to take over the gods of communities in the immediate neighborhood of Rome which it destroyed either politically or actually and to provide them with their accustomed worship. In order that Rome's enemies might not apply the same method the name of the god under whose special protection the city stood was believed to be shrouded in deep mystery as Pliny says in 28. 18: "et durat in pontificum disciplina id sacrum (i.e. evocatio), constatque ideo occultatum in cuius dei tutela Roma esset, ne qui hostium simili modo agerent." None other, of course, than Iuppiter Optimus Maximus was the tutelary deity of Rome.

(4) The Vestal's Prayer

When the Vestal Tuccia was accused of unchastity she called on the goddess to help her prove her innocence. Pliny refers to the prayer she said in 28. 12: "...exstat Tucciae Vestalis incesti

¹Cf. Fowler, Rel. Exper. p. 208. For the magic significance of the devotio ritual see L. Deubner, Archiv für Religionswissenschaft, VIII Beiheft, pp. 66ff.

²Livy 5. 21. 3. Cf. the carmen used at the siege of Carthage in Macrobius 3. 9. 7f.

deprecatio qua usa aquam in cribro tulit anno urbis DXVIII.¹ Valerius Maximus (8. 1. 5) has preserved the words of this prayer: "Vesta, si sacris tuis castas semper admovi manus, effice ut hoc (sc. cribro) hauriam e Tiberi aquam et in aedem tuam perferam." The incident reminds one of the medieval ordeal. The goddess is asked to interfere with the laws of nature to establish the purity of the suppliant. Although no definite spell is put on the deity it is probable that it was felt that the goddess would be constrained to act in accordance with the wishes of the devotee provided the condition as stated corresponded with the actual facts.²

(5) Prayer at a Human Sacrifice

An example of the potency of spells in Pliny's opinion is given by him in 28. 12:

"Boario vero in foro Graecum Graecamque defossos aut aliarum gentium cum quibus tum res esset etiam nostra aetas vidit. cuius sacri precationem qua solet praeire quindecimviri collegii magister si quis legat, profecto vim carminum fateatur, omnia ea adprobantibus octingentorum triginta annorum eventibus."

Whether the carmen pronounced in the circumstances mentioned in this passage was a magic charm or a prayer is difficult to determine since we do not know how it was worded. It is fairly obvious that Pliny thought it was a spell. It was recited by the president of the Board of Fifteen in order to give the act its full efficacy. Pliny's use of the word praeire raises the question whether or not some one else repeated it after the magister as was done on the occasion of the devotio of P. Decius Mus.³ The verb praeire certainly has that significance.

b) Delivery

(1) Precautions Taken

What exhaustive precautions were taken by the Romans to

¹F. Münzer, Beiträge zur Quellenkritik der Naturgeschichte des Plinius, p. 177 note, thinks that this number ought to be changed to DXXVIII to agree with Livy op. XX.

²It is stated in Livy op. XX that the Vestal was condemned, but Münzer (178) is probably right when he says that this is due to the carelessness of the epitomator, since Livy no doubt gave the same version as the other authors.

³Cf. Livy 8. 9. 4: ...agedum, pontifex publicus populi Romani, praei verba, quibus me pro legionibus devoveam. See also F. Schwenn, "Die Menschenopfer bei den Griechen und Römern," Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, bd.15,hft.3,p.207.

ensure the proper and correct delivery of public prayers is described by Pliny in 28. 11:

"...videmusque certis precationibus obsecrasse summos magistratus et, ne quid verborum (al. quod verbum) praetereatur aut praeposterum dicatur, de scripto praeire aliquem rursusque alium custodem dari qui attendat, alium vero praeponi qui favere linguis iubeat, tibicinem canere, ne quid aliud exaudiatur, utraque memoria insigni, quotiens ipsae dirae obstrepentes nocuerint quotiensve precatio erraverit; sic repente extis adimi capita vel corda aut geminari victima stante."

Since the slightest slip in the recitation of a prayer rendered the act invalid it was customary to write down the text of the invocations¹ and the person officiating repeated the words after some one who read them.² Any untoward noise during the ceremony had the same vitiating effect; consequently all bystanders were warned to be silent by the well-known phrase: favete linguis!³ In addition an attendant played the flute to prevent any inauspicious sound from being heard.⁴ Pliny remarks further that whenever a mistake was made in the reciting of the prayer⁵ or some noise disturbed the ceremony the victim's liver or its heart disappeared or doubled, developments which were looked upon as bad omens, as we have seen.⁶

(2) Use of Chaplets

Before beginning either prayer, sacrifice or auspicium the

¹Cic. De dom. 139; Hor. Epist. 2. 1. 26; Val. Max. 4.1.10. For full references see Appel, op. cit. p. 207.

²Livy 4. 27. 1; 9. 46. 6; 8. 9. 4; 10. 28. 14; 41. 21. 11; Tac. Hist. 4. 53. Suet. Claud. 22; et al.

³Sen. De vit. beat. 26. 7: favete linguis, hoc verbum non, ut plerique existimant, a favore trahitur, sed imperat silentium, ut rite peragi possit sacrum nulla voce mala obstrepente. Cf. Cic. De div. 1. 102; Serv. Aen. 5. 71.

⁴Cf. Sen. Ad Marc. de consol. 13. 1; Suet. Tib. 70; Arnob. Adv. nat. 4. 31; Cic. De harusp. resp. 23.

⁵Arnob. Adv. nat. 4. 31 relates that a piaculum was necessary whenever the fluteplayer stopped suddenly in the middle of a sacrifice and it is stated on the Iguvian tablets (Vib 47) that if a mistake is made in a prayer it must be repeated. Cf. Livy 41. 16. 1; Plut. Coriol. 25. 2; Cic. De har. resp. 23.

⁶Cf. the experience of the pontifex maximus L. Metellus Delmaticus when preparing a dedicatory prayer as related in N.H. 11. 174.

Romans used to cover their heads with the toga.¹ This veiling is usually explained as meant to shut out all sights and sounds of profane origin, which, if noticed, would vitiate the devotional act and necessitate a piaculum. Occasionally chaplets were used instead of the toga; Pliny speaks of the practice in 16. 9:

"Antiquitus quidem nulla (sc. corona) nisi deo dabatur...feruntque primum omnium Liberum patrem inposuisse capiti suo ex hedera. postea deorum honori sacrificantes sumpserunt, victimis simul coronatis."

This custom is very probably due to Greek influence since to the Greeks the habit of veiling the head was unknown, but they did make use of chaplets.² Thus Hercules, for instance, being a Greek god was worshipped Graeco ritu which is explained as meaning: with head uncovered.³

A special kind of chaplet is mentioned by Pliny in 21. 3:

"Tenuioribus (sc. coronis) utebantur antiqui, stroppos appellantes, unde nata strophiola. quin et vocabulum ipsum tarde communicatum est, inter sacra tantum et bellicos honores coronis suum nomen vindicantibus."

If the stroppos was the equivalent of the Greek στροφίον it must have been a narrow headband worn by priests; others said that it was a wreath.⁴

(3) Accompanying Actions

A characteristic action of the Roman suppliant while saying his prayers is spoken of by Pliny in 28. 25: "in adorando⁵ dextram ad osculum referimus..." This seems to refer to the practice of throwing kisses to statues of gods which were too far away to be actually touched by the lips of the devotees. There can be no doubt that the custom of kissing statues of the gods on the mouth or chin existed at Rome⁶ and if the image was out of reach the suppliant kissed his right hand⁷ and threw the kiss.

¹Cf. Wissowa, op. cit. p. 396 n. 5; Fowler, Rel. Exper. p. 195 n. 35.

²Cf. Appel, op. cit. p. 191 and note.

³Macrobian. 1. 8. 2.

⁴Cf. Festus p. 410 s.v. STROPPUS.

⁵E. Ernout and A. Meillet, Dictionnaire Étymologique, s.v. ORO give the meaning of adorare as: adresser une prière à, adorer and say that it is used to translate the Greek προσκύω.

⁶Cf. Appel, op. cit. p. 198.

⁷Lucian De salt. 17; Min. Felix 2. 4; Apul. Met. 4. 28; cf. Prop. 1. 6. 17; for representations of the attitude see Daremberg-Saglio, Dict. I. 80ff.

Customarily the Romans prayed with their hands out-stretched in the direction of the temple or the statue of the god addressed or towards the east and especially the heavens as the presumed dwelling place of the Immortals.¹

Folding of the hands, the modern attitude while praying, was not used in Pliny's time except in magic² and to attend religious worship with hands folded was forbidden, as he tells us in 28. 59: "Adsidere gravidis vel cum remedia alicui adhibeantur digitis peccinatim inter se implexis veneficium est...vetuere vero et sacris votisque simili modo interesse..."

(4) Manner of Concluding

From N.H. 28. 25 we learn that after finishing their prayers the Romans used to turn bodily from left to right:³ "in adorando dextram ad osculum referimus totumque corpus circumagimus, quod in laevum fecisse Galliae religiosius credunt." They probably threw a kiss at the same time to the deity they had addressed. They turned to the right presumably because that was the lucky side and if something in the nature of an omen⁴ should meet their eyes coming from the right it would of course be a good omen and would be taken to mean that their prayer would be answered. Pliny's statement that the Gauls turned to the left is contradicted by Posidonius⁵ who claims that they turned to the right. All that can therefore be said is that the Gauls observed the custom but the direction in their case is uncertain.⁶

8. Human Sacrifice

In N.H. 28. 12 we find a much-debated statement about human sacrifices supposed to have taken place at Rome in Pliny's time:

"Boario vero in foro Graecum Graecamque defossos aut aliarum gentium cum quibus tum res esset etiam nostra aetas vidit. cuius sacri precationem qua solet praeire quindecimviri collegii magister si quis legat profecto vim

¹Cf. Appel, op. cit. pp. 194-97.

²Ibid. p. 204.

³Cf. Plaut. Curc. 70: quo me vertam nescio. - Si deos salutas, dextroversum censeo. Plut. Camill. 5. 7; Val. Flacc. 8. 246; Appel, op. cit. p. 213.

⁴Cf. I.M.J. Valetton, Mnemos. NS. 17(1889) p. 313.

⁵Athen. p. 152d. Cf. Valetton, loc. cit. n. 7.

⁶Wissowa, op. cit. p. 396 n. 4 states that the turn was made from right to left but strangely enough all the references he cites are to the contrary.

carminum fateatur, omnia ea adprobantibus ootingentorum triginta annorum eventibus."

Wissowa¹ and others have inferred from this passage and one in Plutarch² that the Romans immolated human beings annually. We have definite information of only two occasions on which a Greek man and a Greek woman and a male and female Gaul were buried alive in the forum Boarium or cattle market. The first burial took place in 226 B.C. because of an oracle;³ the act was repeated in 216 B.C. in order to expiate the unchastity of a Vestal virgin at the recommendation of the Sibylline books.⁴ The discrepancy between these accounts which limit the sacrifice to Greeks and Gauls and Pliny's words cum quibus tum res esset is quite obvious. Furthermore, this expression seems to indicate that the rite was not an annual celebration but rather an irregular one performed only in the crisis of a war.⁵ The mention of 830 years in the context means merely that the precatio at whatever date it might have been uttered had proved itself effectual: the prayer that the state might be saved had been heard by the gods.⁶ Too much importance must not be attached to the present verb solet which signifies merely that whenever the offering is made that particular formula is used.⁷

Moreover, we are told by Pliny in 30. 12-13 that the ritual of human sacrifice was expressly forbidden by a senatus consultum passed in 97 B.C.:

"Exstant certe et apud Italas gentis vestigia eius (i.e. magiae) in XII tabulis nostris aliisque argumentis quae priore volumine exposui. DCLVII demum anno urbis Cn. Cornelio Lentulo P. Licinio Crasso cos. senatus consultum factum est ne homo immolaretur, palamque fit in tempus illud ut sacra prodigiosa celebratio.

"Gallias utique possedit, et quidem ad nostram memoriam. namque Tiberi Caesaris principatus sustulit Druidas eorum et hoc genus vatium medicorumque per senatus

¹Op. cit. p. 421.

²Marc. 3.

³Oros. 4. 13. 3; Plut. Marc. 3; Dio Cass. fragm. 47 Bois-savain; see F. Schwenn, op. cit. p. 148 note.

⁴Livy 22. 57. 4-6; Plut. Q.R. 83.

⁵Cf. J.S. Reid, "Human Sacrifice at Rome and other Notes on Roman Religion," JRS 2(1912), p. 34. C. Cichorius, Römische Studien, pp. 7-20 claims the rite had nothing to do with war, but was performed in 114-13 to expiate the unchastity of three Vestals and for the last time under Caligula or Nero in 38-40 A.D.

⁶Reid, op. cit., p. 34.

⁷Ibid.

consultum...Britannia hodieque eam (ea - Reid) attonita celebrat tantis caeremoniis ut dedisse Persis videri possit. Adeo ista toto mundo consensere quamquam discordi et sibi ignoto. nec satis aestimari potest quantum Romanis debeatur, qui sustulere monstra in quibus hominem occidere religiosissimum erat, mandati vero etiam saluberimum."

It is very hard to believe that Pliny could have written these lines knowing full well that a man and a woman were being offered to the gods annually in the very city which had passed the decree prohibiting the practice. Rather one can scarcely evade any other conclusion than that after 97 B.C. Rome did not tolerate the ritual in any part of the world which was under her control. The phrase et nostra aetas vidit may well be corrupt; Reid¹ very plausibly suggests that Pliny may have written et nostra civitas vidit and states further that it is not too much to say that the clause cum quibus tum res esset is incompatible with the reading aetas.

Livy states emphatically that the rite was quite foreign to Roman religious views in the passage² where he relates its performance in 216 B.C. by calling it minime Romano sacro. The year of the sacrifice is significant: it was after the battle of Cannae when the Romans were at their wits' end and in the depths of despair.

Plutarch's reference³ to the event seems to imply that the killing of 226 was not repeated but that a yearly observance of certain mystic rites was substituted for it, and in Quaestiones Romanae too, it is presumed that a repetition of the act did not take place. For some unknown reason, perhaps because he was misled by some late annalistic writer, he puts the sacrifice ten years earlier than Livy. If his statement about the annual mysterious ceremonies is correct and they took place in an underground vault of the forum Boarium, as he seems to have thought, etiological explanations of their origin may easily have arisen. Puppets may have played a part and wherever dolls were used in later ritual an original actual sacrifice was apt to be deduced.⁴ At any rate it is highly improbable that in Pliny's day actual human sacrifices should have taken place at Rome either yearly or intermittently.

The significance of sacrificing members of nations with whom the Romans were at war has been variously interpreted; the

¹Reid, op. cit. p. 35.

²22. 57.

³Maro. 3.

⁴Cf. Reid, op. cit. p. 39.

most likely explanation seems to be this: the Romans imagined that by burying a male and female member of a people they were consigning them to the powers of the underworld and with them their whole nation.¹ It was one of the numerous magic tricks by means of which primitive people believed they could get the better of their enemies.

9. Means of Purification

a) Laurel

(1) Laurel Trees in front of Houses

Primitive man peopled his surroundings with innumerable spirits, the souls of the dead, which, so he believed, had great power to work harm. Hence his never-flagging efforts to guard himself and his belongings against them by means of rites of purification and to placate them.² Among the substances enjoying a great reputation for efficacy in this connection laurel held a high place from earliest times, and Pliny mentions its usefulness in this regard in l5. 138: "eadem (sc. laurus) purificationibus adhibetur,..."³ Laurel trees were planted in front of the houses of the Caesars⁴ and the pontiffs, partly for ornamental purposes and partly because of the belief in their power to keep off evil spirits as may be seen from N.H. l5. 127: "Laurus triumphis proprie dicatur, vel gratissima domibus, ianitrix Caesarum pontificumque. sola et domus exornat et ante limina exubat." Pliny's use of exubat is most expressive from this point of view and it may well be that he had this belief in mind.

(2) Use in Triumphs

His statement in l5. 127 that laurel is especially dedicated to triumphs Pliny expands greatly in l5. 133-35 by giving many details:

"Ipsa (i.e. laurus) pacifera, ut quam praetendi etiam inter armatos hostes quietis sit indicium. Romanis praecipue laetitiae victoriarumque nuntia additur litteris et militum lanceis pilisque, fasces imperatorum decorat. ex iis in gremio Iovis optimi maxime deponitur, quotiens laetitiam nova victoria adtulit. idque non quia perpetuo viret nec quia pacifera est, praeferenda ei utroque olea,

¹Cf. Schwenn, op. cit. pp. 150-52.

²Cf. M.B. Ogle, "Laurel in Ancient Religion and Folk-Lore," American Journal of Philology, 31(1910), pp. 287 ff.

³Cf. Paul. 104: Itaque eandem laurum omnibus suffitionibus adhiberi solitum erat,...; Serv. Aen. l. 329; Lyd. De mens. 4. 4.

⁴Cf. Ovid Met. l. 562 ff.; Trist. 3. l. 39 ff.

sed quia spectatissima in monte Parnaso ideoque etiam grata Apollini visa, adsuētis eo dona mittere, oracula inde repetere iam et regibus Romanis teste L. Bruto, fortassis etiam in argumentum, quoniam ibi libertatem publicam is meruisset lauriferam tellurem illam osculatus ex responso et quia manu satarum receptarumque in domos sola fulmine non icitur. ob has causas equidem crediderim honorem ei habitum in triumphis potius quam quia suffimentum sit caedis hostium et purgatio, ut tradit Masurius,..."

Although laurel was generally considered to be sacred to Apollo,¹ yet it had so many uses in connection with martial affairs that it was thought sacred to Mars² too, and on his festival on March 1 the Regia, the Curiae, and the houses of the flamens were decorated with fresh laurel branches,³ because of the belief that laurel could aid in keeping off evil spirits. And, if laurel has prophylactic and apotropaic powers over spirits, what is more natural than that it should be used profusely in connection with Mars or war which is responsible for so many avenging ghosts of warriors slain in battle. Masurius gives the correct reason for the use of laurel in triumphs, when the triumphator wore a crown⁴ of laurel and the soldiers decked themselves and their arms with sprigs of it. The purpose was to purify triumphator and soldiers,⁵ i.e. protect⁶ them against the spirits of the enemies they had slaughtered. Pliny does not share this view; he quotes Masurius only to disagree with him. But none of the reasons which he advances to account for the use of laurel in triumphs sounds con-

¹N.H. 12. 3: arborum genera numinibus suis dicata perpetuo servantur, ut...Apollini laurus,...

²Lyd De mens. 4. 4; Roscher, Lex s.v. MARS p. 2427; Fowler, Rom. Fest. p. 36.

³Cf. Fowler, Rom. Fest. pp. 39f.

⁴On pp. 201-203 of C.P. 24(1929) McCartney in his short article "Why did Tiberius wear laurel in the form of a crown during thunder storms?" argues ably in favor of his view that the crown seems to have been originally a magic circle possessing the power to ward off evil and that its strength was reinforced by many kinds of plants and miscellaneous materials, until finally the special virtue was sometimes supposed to reside only in the things forming the circles. He thinks that the use of the crown or wreath as a token of joy and festivity is probably its latest development.

⁵Cf. Paul. p. 104: laureati milites sequebantur currum triumphantis ut quasi purgati a caede humana intrarent urbem.

⁶Cf. Ogle, op. cit. p. 287.

vincing. They smack of a sophisticated age, which, while still adhering to customs going back to primitive times, has either forgotten the underlying reasons or finds them too barbaric or unscientific and therefore attempts to give a rational explanation of the practices which is more in tune with its own thought.¹

(3) Profane Uses

In 15. 135 Pliny observes that laurel must not be put to profane uses: "...adeoque in profanis usibus pollui laurum et oleam fas non est, ut ne propitiandis quidem numinibus accendi ex iis altaria araeve debeant." In spite of Pliny's dictum laurel was put to many uses that were distinctly profani: in love charms,² for instance. The reason for Pliny's injunction against igniting laurel on altars is obscure. An interesting observation made by Ogle³ may be quoted here; he says:

"Can the explanation of Pliny's words lie in a belief that laurel was not pure enough, i.e. was felt to be too closely associated with the spirit world, for the sacrificial fire in honor of the gods of the upper world?"

b. Myrtle

Another plant which the Romans used in rites of purification was the myrtle, as we learn from N.H. 15. 119:

"Arbor ipsa in Europae citeriore caelo, quod a Cerauniis montibus incipit, primum Cerceis in Elpenoris tumulo visa traditur Graecumque ei nomen remanet, quo peregrinam esse apparet. fuit, ubi nunc Roma est, iam cum conderetur; quippe ita traditur, myrtea verbena Romanos Sabinosque, cum propter raptas virgines dimicare voluissent, depositis armis purgatos in eo loco qui nunc signa Veneris Cluacinae habet; cluere enim antiqui purgare dicebant. 120. et in ea quoque arbore suffimenti genus habetur, ideo tum electa, quoniam coniunctioni et huic arbori Venus praeest, haud scio an prima etiam omnium in locis publicis Romae sata, fatidico quidem et memorabili augurio."

The myrtle is unquestionably indigenous to Italy.⁴ According to the legend which Pliny here repeats after Theophrastus (Hist. plant. 5. 8. 3) myrtle is supposed to have appeared first on the

¹Cf. Reid, op. cit. pp. 45-47 who calls the theory that laurel had a purificatory significance in triumphs 'mere guess-work.' See Fowler, Rel. Exp. p. 33.

²Verg. Eol. 8. 106f.; Prop. 2. 28. 35f.

³Op. cit. p. 297.

⁴Cf. V. Hehn, Kulturpflanzen und Haustiere⁷, p. 233.

grave of Elpenor, who fell off the roof¹ on the island of Circe, the promontory south of the Pomptine marshes. Its association with Venus² goes back to the cult of Aphrodite to whom the myrtle was sacred and who was identified with the Roman Venus after having been introduced from Sicily. The name myrtus, from the Greek μύρτος, is an Oriental word.³ Myrtle does not seem to have been used very extensively for purposes of purification; the anecdote about its use in this capacity by the Romans and Sabines may be an aetiological tale to account for the epithet Cloacina⁴ applied to Venus. That myrtle was not exactly in the same class as laurel is shown by one of the distinctions made between an ovatio and a triumph. In the former, which was granted to a general who attained his ends by peaceful means, a myrtle crown was worn,⁵ but in a triumph, as we have seen, the crown was of laurel, because blood had been shed.⁶

c) Hellebore

In 25. 49 we hear of still another plant used by the rural population to purify their homes: "nigrum ex his Melampodium vocant, quo et domos suffiunt purgantque, spargentes et pecora, cum precatione sollemni." Black hellebore, called melampodium because of its use in the arts of divination,⁷ was burned to fumigate homes and in the lustration of livestock which was sprinkled with it, or perhaps its ashes, to the accompaniment of some magic incantation.

¹Homer, Od. 10. 552ff.

²Cf. N.H. 12. 3.

³Cf. Hehn, op. cit. p. 590: "because not to be separated from μύρον, μύρρα, σμύρνα."

⁴Cf. Serv. Aen. 1. 720: Venus dicta et Cloacina, quia veteres cloare purgare dixerunt. Walde-Hofmann, Lateinisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 3rd ed. p. 240 speaking of cluere say: "wenn die Form überhaupt echt und nicht von Plinius lediglich zur Stütze seiner Schreibung Cluacina (sonst nur Augustin; aus Varro?) erfunden sein sollte wie sicher des Serv. auct. Aen. 1. 720 aus Cloacina abstrahiertes cloare. Ernout-Meillet, op. cit. p. 192 also view cloare with suspicion. Wissowa, op. cit. p. 245 says that Venus Cloacina was a goddess of the drain, which is probably right."

⁵Gell. N.A. 5. 6. 20-21: 'Ovalis' corona murtea est: ea utebantur imperatores, qui ovantes urbem introibant.

⁶Cf. Ogle, op. cit. p. 292.

⁷N.H. 25. 47: Melampodis fama divinationis artibus nota est. ob hoc appellatur unum hellebori genus Melampodion.

In the purification of homes cinque-foil was also employed,¹ and sulphur served a similar purpose.²

10. Augurium Canarium

In 18. 14 Pliny has the following interesting statement: "ita enim est in commentariis pontificum: Augurio canario agendo dies constituentur, priusquam frumenta vaginis exeant nec³ antequam in vaginas perveniant." According to this passage the augurium canarium was performed on a day specially appointed by the pontifices at the time when wheat was in the shot-blade, that is, shortly before the heads pushed their way out into the open. This would place the ceremony in the latter half of March or beginning of April because during that period wheat in the vicinity of Rome must have reached the particular stage in its growth described by Pliny, if one may judge from present-day conditions. The nature and purpose of the augurium canarium are explained by Festus 285 as follows: "Rutilae canes, id est non procul a rubro colore, immolantur, ut ait Ateius Capito, canario sacrificio pro frugibus deprecandae saevitiae causa sideris caniculae."⁴ The ceremony was performed not far from a Roman gate which from that circumstance received its name of Porta Catularia.⁵ Modern scholarship has offered various interpretations of this rite; Wissowa seems to think that the dogs were sacrificed on the augurium canarium for the same purpose as they were immolated on the feast of Robigalia, viz. to ward off rust from the grain fields.⁶ This inter-

¹N.H. 25. 109: adhibetur (sc. quinquefolium) et purgandis domibus.

²N.H. 35. 177: habet (sc. sulphur) et in religionibus locum ad expiandas suffitu domos.

³MSS. have et in place of nec which is an emendation by Urlichs; if et is retained the two phrases it connects contradict each other.

⁴Cf. Philarg. ad Verg. Georg. 4. 425: Hac (i.e. stella Sirii) oriente maximi calores et ex his graves morbi: ideoque Romae omnibus annis sacrum Canarium fit per publicos sacerdotes.

⁵Paul. 39: Catularia porta Romae dicta est, quia non longe ab ea ad placandum caniculae sidus frugibus inimicum rufae canes immolabantur, ut fruges flavescentes ad maturitatem perducerentur. Platner-Ashby, op. cit. p. 406 state that the porta Catularia is known only from the statement in Festus just quoted: its size is quite uncertain, as well as its purpose and it certainly was not in the city wall.

⁶Op. cit. pp. 195f.: In letzterer Hinsicht feierte man insbesondere am 25. April zur Abwehr des Rostes von den Getreide-

pretation is unacceptable for several reasons: (1) it is most unlikely that two rites for the same purpose should be performed in close proximity to each other in point of time; (2) the augurium canarium took place before the grain was headed out, at which time there is no danger from rust, which attacks it only later when it is in the blossoming stage.¹ This would occur in central Italy around the end of April; hence the date for the Robigalia, April 25, was well chosen; (3) we have the testimony of Festus that the sacrifice was performed to ward off from the crop the injurious effects of the constellation Canicula. Now it is a well-known fact that the ancients thought of the dog star as the cause of the intense summer heat, doubtless because the constellation rises early in the morning in July, the hottest time of the year. References to this belief as well as the one that the dog star was harmful to man and beast, crops and fields are plentiful in Latin literature.² Why reddish dogs should have been chosen as the victims to propitiate this evil influence has been explained by Gundel³ thus:

"Neque erat difficile iustam victimam invenire. Op-time enim monet Servius Verg. Georg. II. 380: 'victimae numinibus aut per similitudinem aut per contrarietatem immolantur.' Atque stellae aestivae per similitudinem sacrificia deligebant; quae similitudo adeo servabatur, ut rutilae luci rutilae hostiae responderent."

The reason why the rite was performed when the grain was in the shot-blade is not far to seek. This period in the plant's growth is one of the most critical because during it the heads are being formed and their size predetermines to a great extent the ultimate yield. Excessive heat and drought at this time cause the heads to turn out short and puny. Small wonder then that the dog star,

feldern die Robigalia, an denen man in feierlicher Prozession zu dem am 5. Meilensteine der Via Claudia gelegenen Haine des Robigus zog und vom Flamen Quirinalis ein Hund geopfert wurde...In demselben Sinne wie an den Robigalia findet das Hundsoffer von Staatswegen noch einmal statt, bei dem sogenannten Augurium canarium,...¹Cf. P.T. Dondlinger, The Book of Wheat (New York, 1916), p. 167 quoting from N.D.Bul. 68(1906), pp. 651-654: "The most effective rust infection weather may be described as muggy, showery, sultry, rather still hot days, with foggy, cool, dewy nights, at about the blossom period."

²Cf. W. Gundel, "De stellarum appellatione et religione Romana," Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, III Bd.2, pp. 125-39 where this whole question is treated excellently. Cf. N.H. 18. 269f.

³Op. cit. pp. 131 f.

which was held responsible for heat and drought, should be propitiated at this important juncture. Although this rite is designated by various names, Festus calling it sacrificium canarium, Philargyrius, sacrum Canarium, and Pliny, Augurium canarium, there can be little doubt that Pliny uses the official title since he takes his notice out of the commentaries of the pontifices. How are we to account for this designation? A very likely explanation is offered by Gundel (op. cit. p. 137):

"Quoniam vero augurio res futuras explorabant Romani, simile quid hoc sacrificio egisse videntur, atque quae de Cels (Cic. De div. 1, 130; schol. Apoll. Rhod. 2, 498), de Aegyptiis (Pallad. rei rust. VII, 9), de Tauriis (Man. I, 402) memorantur, qui ex ortu caniculae eventum anni praesagiebant..."

It would perhaps be reading too much modern rationalism into antiquity to suggest that the prevailing crop conditions were the basis of the predictions as to whether a fruitful year was to be expected or not and that for this reason the term augurium was employed.

CHAPTER II

PLINY'S BELIEFS

1. God

The views and beliefs which Pliny expresses about the deity, nature and the universe agree for the most part with the teachings of Stoic philosophy. This is particularly apparent in 2. 2 where he says:

"Sacer est (sc. mundus), aeternus, immensus, totus in toto, immo vero ipse totum, infinitus ac finito similis, omnium rerum certus et similis incerto, extra intra cuncta complexus in se, idemque rerum naturae opus et rerum ipsa natura."¹

Pliny thinks of god as not existing apart from nature but as being part of it, permeating, ruling and influencing everything. He makes this still more definite in 2. 27 where the underlying argument seems to be this: God is that which is more powerful than anything else; if he exists apart from nature he should be able to act counter to the laws of nature; but this he cannot do and therefore he must exist in nature. This is of course precisely the view of the Stoics.² Nature is god, is possessed of a numen as Pliny puts it in 2. 1 where he speaks of the universe in the same strain: "Mundum et hoc quodcumque nomine alio caelum appellare libuit, cuius circumflexu degunt cuncta, numen esse credi par est, aeternum, immensum, neque genitum, neque interituum umquam."³ But parts of nature in which this divine power seems to manifest itself more especially he also calls numina, for instance the sun, moon⁴ and stars. Of the sun particularly he speaks in such enthusiastic terms as to create the impression that he thought of it as the god

¹Cf. L. Urlichs, Chrestomathia Pliniana, p. 2 who says: "Diese scheinbar widersprechenden Bezeichnungen finden ihre Erklärung in der pantheistischen Auffassung der Welt und Natur. Insofern diese als das Geschaffene oder als der Schöpfer, was sie beides gleichmässig ist, betrachtet wird, erscheint sie als unendlich und endlich, begrenzt und unbegrenzt, u.s.w."

²Cf. Cic. De nat. deor. 2. 21f.; Sen. De benefic. 4.8; Q.N.

2.45. ³Cf. N.H. 2.208: Quibus in rebus (sc. variis atque mirificis terrae miraculis)...quid possit aliud causae adferre mortalium quispiam quam diffusae per omne naturae subinde aliter atque aliter numen erumpens.

⁴Cf. Ibid. 2.54 where tantorum numinum refers to sun and moon.

par excellence: 2. 12-13:

"Eorum (sc. siderum) medius sol fertur amplissima magnitudine ac potestate, nec temporum modo terrarum-que sed siderum etiam ipsorum caelique rector. Hunc esse mundi totius animum ac planius mentem, hunc principale naturae regimen ac numen credere decet opera eius aestumantis."

But probably all he means is that the sun is the most important manifestation of that divine power in nature, because in the very next paragraph he leaves it undecided whether the sun or something else is to be looked upon as god: "Quisquis est deus, si modo est alius (sc. ac sol) et quacumque in parte, totus est sensus, totus auditus, totus animae, totus animi, totus sui." Pliny's attempt to explain the nature of this divine force present in the whole universe can scarcely be called successful. However, the important thing is his conviction that only such a divine force exists and that therefore the popular belief in numerous anthropomorphic divinities is absurd and irrational. The multitudinous mythological tales invented and propagated by poets he pronounces so much childish nonsense: 2. 17:

"Matrimonia quidem inter deos credi tantoque aevo ex his neminem nasci, et alios esse grandaevos semper canos-que, alios iuvenes atque pueros, atrii coloris, aligeros, claudos, ovo editos et alternis diebus viventes morientes-que, puerilium prope deliramentorum est. sed super omnem inpuentiam adulteria inter ipsos fingi, mox iurgia et odia, atque etiam furtorum esse et scelerum numina."

He inveighs rather bitterly against human weakness and stupidity which deifies abstractions and places in the ranks of the gods even sickness and other evils; he ridicules the custom of considering one's spiritual double, the Genius or Juno, divine and he does not mince words to describe how degrading and despicable are the various foreign cults, especially, perhaps, the Egyptian: 2. 16: "...gentes vero quaedam animalia et aliqua etiam obscena prodis habeant ac multa dictu magis pudenda, per fetidas cepas, alia et similia iurantes." Nevertheless, Pliny realises the expediency of a belief in gods who punish misdeeds, even if somewhat tardily, and says in 2. 26: "Verum in his deos agere curam rerum humanarum credi ex usu vitae est, poenasque maleficiis aliquando seras occupato deo in tanta mole, numquam autem inritas esse..." It was for these same reasons of expediency that Cicero wished the state religion preserved although he refused to believe in it and even ridiculed it.¹

¹Cf. De leg. 2. 16.

Pliny was obviously much impressed by the theory advanced by Euhemerus that all gods were deified men. He believed, for instance, that Mercury, Liber and Ceres had made useful inventions and for that reason had been ranked among the gods.¹

As our author rejected the innumerable gods believed in by the masses, so he opposed the cult of Fortuna which enjoyed such a great vogue in his day.² Contemporary poets bear witness to this popularity by continually talking about Fors and Fortuna; Juvenal³ assures us that many believed that everything was governed by Fortune.

But there were those who thought nothing of and denied Fortuna, claiming that the stars rule the fate of man: 2. 23:

"Pars alia et hanc (i.e. Fortunam) pellit astroque
suo eventus adsignat nascendi legibus, semelque in omnes
futuros umquam deo decretum, in reliquum vero otium da-
tur. Sedere coepit sententia haec, pariterque et erudi-
tum volgus et rude in eam cursu vadit."

Pliny, however, does not appear to have placed any faith in astrology either; he opposed the doctrine that the same lot in life would fall to all men born under the same star, saying in 7. 165: "...hoc etiam iisdem horis nascentibus in toto mundo cotidie evenit, pariter domini ac servi gignuntur, reges et inopes." He seems to deny any connection between men and the stars in 2. 28-29:

"Sidera, quae adfixa diximus mundo, non illa, ut existimat volgus, singulis attributa nobis, et clara diviti-
bus, minora pauperibus, obscura defectis, ac pro sorte cuiusque lucentia adnumerata mortalibus, nec cum suo quaque homine orta moriuntur nec aliquem exstingui decidua significant. Non tanta caelo societas nobiscum est ut nostro fato mortalis sit ibi quoque siderum fulgor."

On the other hand, he distinctly affirms it in 2. 95: "Idem Hipparchus numquam satis laudatus, ut quo nemo magis adprobaverit cognationem cum homine siderum animasque nostras partem esse caeli, novam stellam et aliam in aevo suo genitam deprehendit." The explanation seems to be that in the first passage he was concerned with the astrological theories according to which each man's fate was settled once and for all by the position of the different constellations at the hour of his birth and at the same time a star rose which disappeared again at the man's death. In the second passage he is thinking of the Stoic view that the soul of man is a spark of the divine fire to which it returns when the body dies.

¹N.H. 7. 191; cf. *Ibid.* 11. 123; 12. 11; 13. 100.

²*Ibid.* 2. 22.

³13. 86 ff.

Regarding providence Pliny again follows Stoic teaching. God is not superior to the laws of nature but is rather the power of nature itself as Pliny says distinctly in 2. 27:

"Imperfectae vero in homine naturae praecipua solatia, ne deum quidem posse omnia; namque nec sibi potest mortem consciscere si velit, quod homini dedit optimum in tantis vitae poenis, nec mortalis aeternitate donare, aut revocare defunctos, nec facere, ut qui vixit, non vixerit, qui honores gessit, non gesserit, nullumque habere in praeterita ius praeterquam oblivionis, atque, ut facetis quoque argumentis societas haec cum deo copuletur, ut bis dena viginti non sint aut multa similiter efficere non posse, per quae declaratur haut dubie naturae potentia, idque esse quod deum vocemus."

The Stoics held that inexorable and unchangeable laws govern the universe wisely and beneficently on the whole and that man ought to submit to them.¹ That in Pliny's day thinking men should come to the conclusion that the world was ruled by blind fate rather than by a divine mind is not surprising when one remembers the frequent references to dishonesty, treachery and immorality. Pliny's pessimistic view of life leads him to doubt in 2. 20 whether there is any providence at all:

"agere curam rerum humanarum illud quidquid est summum? anne tam tristi atque multiplici ministerio non polui credamus? dubitemusne? Vix prope est iudicare, utrum magis conducat generi humano, quando aliis nullus est decorum respectus, aliis pudendus."²

Pliny was not an atheist in the true sense of the term; he did not deny the existence of some divine power to which man and creation in general owed their being. Nor was he a polytheist. He rejected the polytheistic state religion, the various foreign cults and creeds, astrology and other types of superstition and enthroned instead a pantheistic monotheism: the power of nature is his god. His moral principles were high and thoroughly Stoic; noble and serious-minded, a lover of justice and admirer of virtue he hated cruelty and tyranny; he never ceases to condemn the unbridled luxury and moral corruption he saw around him.

2. Deified Abstractions

Regarding the deified abstractions Pliny expresses his own

¹Cf. Sen. *De provid.* 5.

²See Ulrichs, *Chrest.* p. 10. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6. 21: Sed haec mihi ac talia audienti in incerto iudicium est, fatone res mortaliu[m] et necessitate immortalis an forte volvantur.

views fully and unmistakably in a passage where he inveighs against human weakness which would inquire into the form and figure of the deity: 2. 14-15:

"Quapropter effigiem dei formamque quaerere imbecillitatis humanae reor. Quisquis est deus, si modo est alius, et quacumque in parte, totus est sensus, totus visus, totus auditus, totus animae, totus animi, totus sui. Innumeros quidem credere atque etiam ex vitiis hominum, ut Pudicitiam, Concordiam, Mentem, Spem, Honorem, Clementiam, Fidem, aut (ut Democrito placuit) duos omnino, Poenam et Beneficium, maiorem ad socordiam accedit. Fragilis et laboriosa mortalitas in partes ista digessit infirmitatis suae memor, ut portionibus coleret quisque quo maxime indigeret."

It is obvious from the foregoing that Pliny rejects with scorn all deified concepts; he berates as sheer folly the tendency to set up as deities mental qualities and concepts in general. His remark in 2. 16 about shrines dedicated to evil powers corresponds very closely to a passage in Cicero.¹ But this similarity does not necessarily mean that Pliny is indebted to Cicero's philosophical works for the opinions he expresses here, although perhaps a certain amount of influence cannot be denied. But both authors may have taken this particular passage from Varro. Besides, Pliny's list of deified abstractions in 2. 14 does not give the impression of having been taken from Cicero de leg. 2. 19 where he has: "...Mentem, Virtutem, Pietatem, Fidem..." or 2. 28: "...Salutis, Honoris, Opes, Victoriae,...Spes...Fortunaque..." It is worth while noticing that Pliny's point of view is shared by Seneca who discarded the abstract with the mythological gods: nowhere in his moral essays and epistles does he mention them. His treatise De superstitione which unfortunately has been almost entirely lost seems to have been partly an attack on the deified abstractions if one may judge by a fragment preserved by S. Augustine:²

"...Hostilius (sc. dedicavit) Pavorem atque Pallorem taeterrimos hominum affectus, quorum alter mentis territae motus est, alter corporis ne morbus quidem, sed color. Haec numina potius credes et caelos recipies."

3. Divi Imperatores

Pliny has stated his views concerning the deification of deserving men in 2. 18-19 in these terms:

"Deus est mortali iuvare mortalem, et haec ad aeter-

¹De nat. deor. 3. 63. Cf. De leg. 2. 28.

²De civ. dei 6. 10.

nam gloriam via. hac procures iere Romani, hac nunc caelesti passu cum liberis suis vadit maximus omnis rector aevi Vespasianus Augustus fessis rebus subveniens. Hic est vetustissimus referendi bene merentibus gratiam mos, ut tales numinibus adscribant. quippe et aliorum nomina deorum et quae supra retuli siderum ex hominum nata sunt meritis."

Pliny thinks that men consider him a god who helps his fellow-men and that it is a time-honored custom to show such a man gratitude by ranking him with the gods. He had no illusions of course about their being gods in reality but he believed that a benefactor of mankind was entitled to divine honors with as much reason as Jupiter, Mercury and the rest who were humans deified after their death because of some valuable service rendered to mankind.¹ It is interesting to note that Pliny forecasts the deification of Vespasian; how much of the high praise bestowed on him was due to a desire on Pliny's part to flatter and how much to a genuine appreciation of the emperor's high qualities is a matter of conjecture; but the close friendship in which the two men were united and Pliny's almost complete retirement during the tyrant Nero's reign give one the impression that he was sincere.

4. Immortality

In 7. 188-90 Pliny takes great pains to discredit and refute the belief in the immortality of man; the passage, although somewhat lengthy, is worth quoting in full:

"Post sepulturam vanae manium ambages. omnibus a supremo die eadem quae ante primum, nec magis a morte sensus ullus aut corpori aut animae quam ante natalem. eadem enim vanitas in futurum etiam se propagat et in mortis quoque tempora ipsa sibi vitam mentitur, alias immortalitatem animae, alias transfigurationem, alias sensum inferis dando et manes colendo deumque faciendo qui iam etiam homo esse desierit, ceu vero ullo modo spirandi ratio ceteris animalibus distet aut non diuturniora in vita multa reperiuntur, quibus nemo similem divinat immortalitatem.

"quod autem corpus animae per se? quae materia? ubi cogitatio illi? quo modo visus, auditus aut qui tangit? quis usus ex iis aut quod sine iis bonum? quae deinde sedes quantave multitudo tot saeculis animarum velut umbrarum? puerilium ista delentimentorum avidaeque numquam

¹Cf. N.H. 25. 2: at, Hercules, singula quosdam inventa deorum numero addidere,...

desinere mortalitatis commenta sunt. similis de adser-
vandis corporibus hominum ac revivescendi promisso Demo-
criti vanitas, qui non revixit ipse.

"quae, malum, ista dementia est iterari vitam morte?
quaeve genitis quies umquam, si in sublimi sensus animae
manet, inter inferos umbrae? perdit profecto ista dulcedo
credulitasque praecipuum naturae bonum, mortem, ac dupli-
cat obituri dolorem etiam futuri aestimatione. etenim si
dulce vivere est, cui potest esse vixisse? at quanto faci-
lius certiusque sibi quemque credere, specimen securitatis
antegenitali sumere experimento!"

He arrives at the conclusion that man becomes after death what
he was before birth and neither body nor soul is capable of any
sensation. He finds the source of the belief in immortality in
the human desire for it, which, however, he declares to be stupid
since it would deprive man of nature's greatest boon, viz. death.
He held the Stoic belief about the origin of the human soul and
says in 2. 95 that it was akin to and part of the divine ether
and the stars.

After this impassioned denial of the soul's immortality
one reads with some surprise in 11. 277 that the anima alone sur-
vives man:

"dolorem sentire non poterat (sc. anima), tactu sen-
sueque omni carebat sine quibus nihil sentitur; eadem com-
meabat recens assidue, exitura supremo et sola ex homine
superfutura, denique haec trahebatur e caelo."

Rummler,¹ on the basis of this passage, tries to make out a case
for Pliny's belief in immortality; his argument runs approximate-
ly like this: That by which we exist consisted in Pliny's opinion
of a certain finer kind of air. Anima in the sense of breath is
of the same nature as anima in the sense of principle of life.
This divine element, then, which gives life to man leaves the body
at death, but does not perish, rather it is carried on high. It
is without consciousness or thought since these can exist only
when the anima is joined with a body. Rummler admits, however,
that other explanations are possible seeing that the matter is
very obscure and it is not sufficiently evident that Pliny had
any clear-cut opinion about it at all. But it is highly improb-
able that this is a wholly correct interpretation of our author's
view. It may be granted that Pliny had in mind here and agreed
with the Stoic view according to which the soul returns at death
to the divine element whence it came and that, since this element
is eternal, the soul too may be said to have a continued exist-

¹C. Plinii Secundi Philosophumena, pp. 55f.

ence. But at the same time he no doubt realised that such a survival can scarcely be called immortality and I feel assured of his firm conviction that human hopes of immortality based on an individual survival of the anima are utterly futile and doomed to disappointment.

He did believe, however, that there was one way in which men could immortalize themselves, viz. by their writings; in 13. 70 he says:

"mox aemulatione circa bibliothecas regum Ptolemaei et Eumenis, supprime chartas Ptolemaeo, idem Varro membranas Pergami tradit repertas. postea promiscue repatuit usus rei qua constat immortalitas hominum."
and in 14. 4: "...regesque innumeri honore artium colebantur et in ostentatione has praeferebant opes, immortalitatem sibi per illas prorogari arbitantes, qua re abundabant et praemia et opera vitae." This idea was of course a commonplace in antiquity and is frequently expressed in literature.¹

5. Suicide

During the reigns of tyrannous Roman emperors it had become customary for men of high spirit to commit suicide rather than submit to unmerited and dishonoring punishment and unworthy treatment. The Stoics especially approved of the act and regarded it as virtuous and wise. Pliny thinks that no one should love life so much as to be willing to live under any conditions and that of all the gifts bestowed on man by nature the power to end one's life is the best: 28. 9:

"vitam quidem non adeo expetendam censemus ut quoquo modo trahenda sit. ...quapropter hoc primum quisque in remediis animi sui habeat, ex omnibus bonis quae homini tribuit natura nullum melius esse tempestiva morte, idque in ea optimum quod illam sibi quisque praestare poterit."
In 2. 27 he glories in the reflection that man is even superior to god in this respect because man can end his life but god cannot: "...namque nec sibi potest (sc. deus) mortem consciscere, si velit, quod homini dedit optimum in tantis vitae poenis,..."
Whether this opinion is due to his Stoic convictions or to his generally pessimistic view of life cannot be determined with certainty.

6. Omens and Portents

In attempting to ascertain what Pliny's own belief was regarding the omens and portents which he relates and the different ways of foretelling the future he mentions we will find that the

¹Cf. Plin. Epist. 6. 16. 3.

certainty with which it can be determined varies greatly.

We have already seen that, while somewhat uncertain whether any supernatural significance should be attached to dreams, he seems to lean toward denying it. On the score of omens, portents and the various other schemes in use for drawing conclusions about coming events he makes this pronouncement in 2. 23-24:

"Pars alia et hanc (sc. Fortunam) pellit astroque suo eventus adsignat nascendi legibus, semelque in omnes futuros umquam deo decretum, in reliquum vero otium datur. Sedere coepit sententia haec, pariterque et eruditum volutus et rude in eam cursu vadit. Ecce fulgurum monitus, oraculorum praescita, haruspicum praediota, atque etiam parva dictu in auguriis sternumenta et offensiones pedum. ...Quae singula improvidam mortalitatem involvunt, solum ut inter ista vel certum sit nihil esse certi nec quicquam miserius homine aut superbius."

If these were Pliny's true sentiments we would be justified in saying that he scoffed at all portents and divination and held none worthy of any sane man's consideration. But such a conclusion would indeed be hasty because from many another passage it appears that he not only did not doubt the significance of some portents but even attached great importance to them.

Thus he states definitely that earthquakes always portend misfortune and that the city of Rome never experienced such a disturbance without its being the herald of some disaster.¹ He is equally certain that the birth of quadruplets at Ostia portended the famine which followed soon after,² and he seems convinced that mice foretold the Marsian war by gnawing the silver shields at Lavinium and the death of Carbo by chewing up his shoe-strings.³ Fishes, too, he thinks, are capable of forecasting future events.⁴

By far the greater number of portents and prodigies, however, are reported by Pliny without any comment of his own and we cannot decide what his true opinion about them may have been. To maintain, as Rummel does,⁵ that simply because he did not add some word of doubt or disapproval when recounting certain portents he thought them significant and credible is to draw unwarranted conclusions. For instance, he relates in 11. 186 how the absence

¹N.H. 2. 200.

²Ibid. 7. 33: proxume supremis divi Augusti quaedam e plebe Ostiae duos maris totidem feminas enixa famam quae consecuta est portendit haut dubie.

³Ibid. 8. 221.

⁴Ibid. 9. 55.

⁵Op. cit. p. 39.

of the heart in the exta of the victim was interpreted as a bad omen for Caesar and in ll. 195 he tells that the doubling of the gall bladder was explained as a good one for Augustus, without, however, speaking his mind either for or against the practice of deriving prognostications by extispicium. Neither does he definitely declare his position with respect to many of those celestial phenomena which were regarded by the masses as awful portents and as warnings of divine vengeance. In most cases he seems to be merely reporting what he found in his sources. At times he tries to give a natural explanation of these prodigies as of the showers of stones, for instance; he thought the stones had been carried aloft by strong winds and were allowed to drop later when the force of the winds abated. The appearance of comets he believed to have nearly always an evil significance and he seems to have shared the superstitious dread with which northern lights, falling meteors and similar phenomena were regarded.¹ Eclipses of the sun and moon he did decidedly not look upon as portents because he, like other educated people of his time, was fully aware of and understood clearly their natural causes.² When he speaks of prolonged eclipses in 2. 98 as being of a portentous nature he does so no doubt because he could not explain them on natural grounds as he did the ordinary ones.

In some instances, while not denying the value of certain events as omens, Pliny disagrees with the interpretations usually given them; the example of the bees mentioned in ll. 55 is a case in point. That he did not accept and believe in every popular superstition current in his day seems to be indicated by his remark in 10. 34-35 where, after stating that the horned owl is of evil omen he goes on to say that he personally knows of several instances in which this bird did not portend a death in the house on which it had perched contrary to the common belief.

Pliny states what he thought was the connection between prodigies and subsequent events in 2. 97:

"Fit et sanguinea specie et, quo nihil terribilius mortalium timori est, incendium ad terram cadens inde, sicut Olympiadis CVII anno tertio, cum rex Philippus Graeciam quateret. Atque haec ego statis temporibus naturae ut cetera arbitror exsistere, non ut plerique variis de causis, quas ingeniorum acumen excogitat. Quippe ingentium malorum fuere praenuntia, sed ea accidisse non quia haec facta sunt arbitror, verum haec ideo facta quia incasura erant illa."

¹Cf. N.H. 2. 97; 100.

²Cf. Ibid. 2. 54-55.

Pliny apparently means that whenever a disaster is about to occur it brings about a portent to herald its approach; in other words, the impending disaster is the cause of the portent but the portent is not the cause of the disaster.¹ It is difficult to see what point Pliny is trying to make by this hairsplitting distinction since the result is identical in either case, viz. portents have significance: they predict disasters.

In general, there can be little doubt that Pliny was strongly inclined towards superstition and only too frequently do his innate superstitious tendencies get the better of his attempts to adopt a scientific attitude. However, absolute certainty on this question is impossible of attainment and as Rummler² puts it: "...in re tam incerta iis qui aliter iudicant, nemo facile obloqui poterit."

¹Rummler, op. cit. p. 43 would have it thus and says:
'Talem igitur rationem inter ostentum et eventum interesse putat,
ut ostentum causa eventus sit.'

²Ibid.

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